Improving Rejection Rates for Amendments received from Regional Vital Records Offices – CPM Project

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Introduction

Record keeping has been an important part of human history. From caveman drawings and hieroglyphics to Roman Censuses, and from medieval bills of mortality to modern digital records it has been an important part of the human experience to record the significant events that go on around us. Today, the Division of Vital Statistics plays a key role to fulfilling that need as we record data from the first breaths of a newborn baby to the final resting place of centenarians and several other data points in between. As a division within the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), Vital Statistics strives to fulfill the mission statement: "Healthy People Living in Healthy Communities." The data we collect contributes to improving the overall communal wellbeing by identifying trends to public health conditions and behaviors at these important points in people's lives. It also is a marker in the form of a legal certificate that provides individuals a way to prove their identity.

The Vital Records Certification teams, as a sub-program within Vital Statistics, are tasked with the housing and issuance of accurate legal certified copies of these events. Certified copies of birth, death, marriage, and divorce records have become such an important part of our lives. Whether you are applying for a driver's license or passport, applying for insurance benefits, retiring, or just going on a cruise, chances are at some point in your life you will need certified copies of your life events from Vital Records. Our job is to make sure when you receive that copy it matches the information on the original certificate and it also matches the legal information you have used throughout your life.

The original records we hold are stored in a central facility in Columbia. However, to assist citizens that live across the great state of South Carolina, DHEC maintains 15 regional vital records offices in key county locations from Charleston to Horry to Greenville to name just a few. These offices can view and issue certified copies of the original copies housed in the State Office. Though they do not have access to the original physical copies they are able to view a digital copy of these events from our specialized software system called VRSIIS (Vital Records Statistics and Integrated Information System). The employees in these offices are trained to review citizen's identification and applications to ensure that they are legally entitled to the information contained on the record. They then compare and verify this information to the images of these records to ensure what prints out on the certified copies is consistent with the original copy.

Sometimes situations occur in which the information does not match up as it should. In these cases, South Carolina's laws and regulations provide for the ability, under most situations, to make administrative corrections or amendments to a vital record. These amendments vary from correcting the spelling of names or dates of birth to adding a parent to a record. To maintain uniformity, ensure that amendments follow all applicable laws and regulations, and are properly recorded on the original records, regional offices only initiate amendments which are then approved, completed, and housed in the state office.

In other words, regional offices can gather evidence necessary to support the correction as prescribed by regulation or the state registrar (e.g. school records, reports from agencies or hospitals, marriage licenses, other birth certificates, etc.), create an affidavit for the customer

to sign, and notarize the document for the customer, all on site. However, for the amendment to be applied to the record, the regional office must send the amendment and copies of the supporting documents to the state office where it is reviewed for acceptability, applied to the record, and permanently stored. If an amendment does not pass the review of acceptability it is "rejected" and sent back to the office to gather additional evidence, recomplete the affidavit, or inform the customer that the amendment is not able to be completed through an administrative process. When this happens, it is obviously a very difficult situation for the customer. No one enjoys having to redo a process that they already thought had been completed several days or weeks earlier.

Problem Statement

My goal as the Regional Operations Manager of vital records is to evaluate and find ways to improve this process to minimize the negative effect on our customers throughout the state. When I began this project, there was no method in place for tracking how many amendments were being rejected and sent back to each office and employee. It also didn't allow us to identify any common themes to show why amendments were being rejected so we could find ways to fix them. The only data that was being kept was by a single employee via a manual process of counting by hand how many amendments were received and rejected each month (see appendix A). This data was only collected on a general statewide basis and had no official structure for how the data was collected. According to the data collected by this employee, the rate of rejection from June 2012 to June 2017 on a statewide level typically

ranged between 10% up to almost 35% of all amendments received. The data gathered from January 2017 to June 2017 shows an average rejection rate of 12.2%.

This does not inspire confidence in customers if they knew that they only had between a 70% to 90% chance that their documents would be processed correctly the first time. DHEC's strategic plan to fulfill the afore mentioned mission statement includes four core values:

Embracing Service, Inspiring Innovation, Promoting Teamwork, and Pursuing Excellence. This project will help to fulfill these values by inspiring supervisors to look for innovative solutions as they work with their office as a team to lower their rejection rate. By doing so, we reach a higher level of excellence in serving the general public and instill greater confidence in the abilities we have to perform our duties.

Data Collection

To effectively evaluate and recommend improvements to this process, it was necessary to modernize the tracking system in use by the program. The previous method of tracking amendments was through hand written transmittal logs that were mailed to the state office along with the amendments to be processed. Those logs were not sorted by office or employee or stored long term, making it impossible to calculate anything other than a statewide rejection rate. It was also impossible to know how many amendments to expect to receive or if a batch had been missed, unless the regional office called several weeks later and asked why their amendments hadn't been processed.

To solve these problems and collect the data necessary, I utilized Microsoft Excel and its online capabilities to create spreadsheets that were shared between the Region Support Team that processed the amendments in the state office and the respective regional offices (see appendix B). Matrices were developed that automatically calculated how many amendments were completed and sent each month by each individual employee and office (see appendix C). In order to maintain uniformity in the collection of the data it was determined that amendments and rejections would be counted on the month in which the receipt was created. That way even if, for example, an amendment was received in August but rejected in September it would all be counted on the same month. This did make the numbers slightly fluctuate from month to month and they may still have slight changes due to the fact that sometimes a customer can't complete the amendment on the same day it was begun. In these cases, they would have to bring it back sometimes months later. However, these are minimal in the overall numbers and this tracking system ensures that each rejection is counted in the same month with its respective amendment.

I also developed another spreadsheet from which I could pull the data from those individual spreadsheets to combine the information and log the rejections. This enable me to be able to calculate an accurate office, regional, and state rejection rate (see appendix D). All the rejections were scanned and maintained digitally as well as in hard copy form. These spreadsheets and rejections will be very easy to combine at the end of each fiscal year to be stored safely and permanently on a DHEC server for future analysis.

I met in June 2017 with all the region and office supervisors to train them on how to operate these spreadsheets and to help them understand the importance of this project. I provided them with a checklist for each type of amendment and instructed them to begin reviewing each amendment prior to sending it to the state office. The purpose was to help ensure that the amendment was complete prior to sending it to the state office. That didn't mean it could not be rejected, but it was intended to help prevent offices from sending amendments that were missing obvious items such as signatures or dates. Ultimately, this did not stop all rejections of this nature but the Region Support Team did note a decrease in the amount that were rejected for that reason. Unfortunately, due to the lack of previous data kept, it is impossible to determine whether there was in fact a decrease that could specifically be attributed to this checklist. However, a dramatic decrease in the overall rejection rate is noted below.

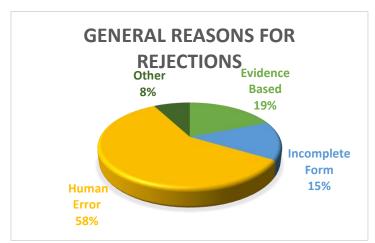
Supervisors also kept individual data on each employee and built into their performance planning stages a goal to maintain their individual rejection rate under 10%. Supervisors, in turn, were also given the goal to keep their office or region rejection rates under 10%. My personal goal for the state is to bring the statewide rejection rate less than 5% for three consecutive months by the end of June 2018 with the recommendations of this project. As we continue to make process improvements, we will eventually reach this goal. To help develop team spirit and motivation to follow the plan among all region staff, each month an email was sent out to all regional staff congratulating each office that achieved zero rejections that month, offering tips and advice, recognizing data trends and encouraging employees to

continue to improve. With the exception of an email send in December that recognized a handful of individuals that personally had not yet received any rejections since implementation of this new process, no individual employee data was included in the monthly email reports. All five of those employees maintained zero percent rejection rates through the end of December.

Data Analysis

Appendix C shows that over the course of July 2017-December 2017 the average rejection rate during this time frame was about 6.1% which is halved from the 13.8% that it had been from January to June of the same year. Again, due to the lack of data gathered before implementation of this system, it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to the sudden decline in the state rejection rate. However, now that there is a baseline of data it is possible to test other possible solutions to improve the rejection rate further.

In January 2018, all of the rejections from the previous 6 months were compiled and analyzed. A total of 1848 amendments were received at the state office and 112 amendments



were rejected for an overall rejection rate of 6.1%. Those rejections were grouped into four categories due to the reason that they were rejected:

Human Error (68), Evidence Based (22),
Incomplete Form (17), and Other (9).

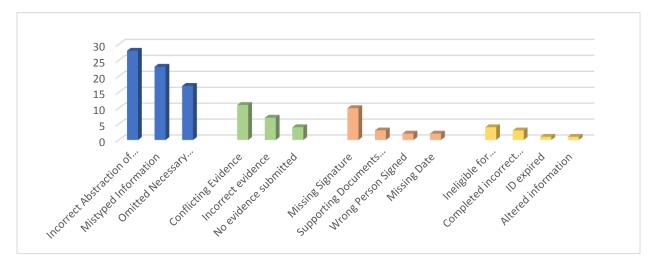
The purpose of dividing them into these general categories was to be able to analyze the reasons for rejection so as to create recommendations for future improvement. It is important to note that the

total of these reasons for rejections (116) is higher than the total number of rejections for the state due to the fact that some amendments were rejected for more than one reason. However the overall results show that through the measures implemented, the rate of rejection was cut in half (from 12.2% to 6.1%) from the previous six months of the year.

Human Error was the category that had the largest number of rejections but only had three main categories under which they fell. Incorrect Abstraction of Evidence (28) meant that there was no error with the evidence submitted, it was simply listed in an improper format on the affidavit. Mistyped Information (23) meant that the employee creating the affidavit either misspelled a name or other information that was correctly listed on the evidence. Omitted Necessary Correction (17) From Evidence was the last category that included rejections that had appropriate evidence to make a correction that was not listed on the affidavit. For example, if a record needed to have the child's first name and the mother's first name corrected and the evidence submitted was sufficient to establish both but only one of the necessary corrections was listed on the affidavit.

Evidence based rejections means that the amendment was rejected due to an error with the evidence that was submitted. Three main categories emerged as the principle reasons for this type of rejection: Conflicting Evidence (11), Incorrect Evidence (7), and No Evidence Submitted (4). Conflicting Evidence encompasses rejections that included conflicting information on the evidence such as two different spellings of names or different dates of birth. Incorrect Evidence would be evidence that was rejected because it did not meet the guidelines required by regulation or as prescribed by the state registrar. No Evidence Submitted meant the affidavit was drawn up without any evidence but was not an amendment that could be performed without evidence.

Incomplete form rejections were due to an error in the form itself or in the packet that was sent along with it. The four main categories emerged as the principal reasons for rejection in this category were Missing Signature (10), Supporting Documents Not Submitted (3), Wrong Person Signed (2), and Missing Date (2). Missing Signature meant that either the customer, notary, or the person who reviewed the evidence failed to sign in the appropriate location on the form. Supporting Documents

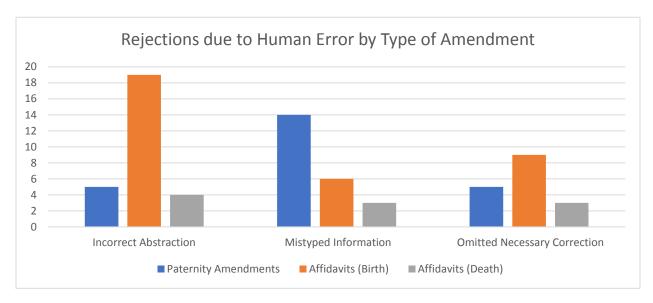


Not Submitted meant that there was supporting evidence included on the affidavit but a copy was not submitted along with the packet to the state office for review. Wrong Person Signed means that the affidavit was signed by a person who was not entitled to make the requested correction. Missing Date means that a necessary date was omitted from the affidavit.

The final category of Other was simply a catch all category for any other type of rejections. The main reasons for rejection in this category was Ineligible for Administrative Correction (4) meaning that there was a prior amendment such as a court order or affidavit correcting the same item that precluded this amendment from being corrected by an administrative correction. Completed Incorrect Type of Amendment (3) was when the employee completed the wrong type of amendment. For example, if the parent's are married, a Legitimation should be completed rather than a Paternity Acknowledgement which is for unmarried parents. Two other rejections were received that were separate categories. One

had some information that was altered after the amendment was signed and the other the affiant had an expired ID and therefore could not complete the amendment.

Because Human Error was the category that had by far the greatest amount of rejections that category was selected for further scrutiny. An analysis was run that divided out the rejections by the



type of amendment that was completed which showed that the single highest category of rejections by reason and type of amendment was affidavits of correction to birth certificates that had the evidence abstracted incorrectly. A total of 19 amendments were rejected due to this error. That amounts to about 1% of the rejection rate of all amendments statewide caused by just birth affidavits. This is particularly significant due to the fact that there were only 508 birth affidavits sent to the state office during this time compared to 1047 Paternity Amendments and 158 Death affidavits. If you include the paternity amendments and death affidavits that means that 1.5% of all affidavits are rejected due to the customer service employee incorrectly abstracting the evidence provided by the customer.

The difficulty in abstracting evidence on an affidavit is due to the fact that no two pieces of evidence are the same. One may have the date it was filed at the top of the document and another may have them in an entirely different location. The reccommendation for improvement due to this study is

to create a training and guide for abstraction to distribute to all staff (an example of what this could look like is shown in appendix E) that can be utilized during the process of typing an amendment affidavit.

This guide shows where particular information needs to go in an easy to read format that explains where each item goes and where to typically find this information on the evidence supplied.

Implementation

This solution should be developed by Vital Records leadership to include the Director of Certification, the Regional and State Office Managers, and the Amendment Team supervisor with input from select region supervisors and staff. Vital Records recently implemented a statewide training for customer service in which all regional staff were able to attend. The training was broken down into three days and one third of each office came on each day to attend. It was also done on days of the week that were typically less busy in the offices so that impact to staff and customer flow was minimal. A similar format could be used to bring region staff into the state office to introduce the new handout and train them on how to use it and answer questions. This guide should also be made part of the new Vital Records operations manual which is currently under development. Other than the cost for the selected managers and supervisors to meet and develop this training the cost should be minimal to the department. The guide itself could be developed within weeks and distribution to staff could take place shortly thereafter. Using the customer service training as a baseline, the training could be developed in approximately 5-6 months. After it is approved from agency leadership it could be ready to implement as early as September 2018.

The obstacles to this implementation is the fact that Vital Records is currently developing and implementing a new software system which takes a large amount of time from all of the positions necessary to develop this training. This could be overcome by delegating the actual creation of

powerpoints and other training resources to the supporting supervisors and the amendment supervisor thereby allowing the Director and State and Regional Managers to guide the process rather than performing the more time intensive parts along the way. DHEC also has training coordinators that could be used to review and give input on curriculum and suggestions for other potential teaching methods.

By utilizing this guide and ensuring that their staff is properly trained on the abstraction of evidence and other areas of the amendment process, Vital records has the potential to bring the rejection rate under 5%. The real world application to this is that when customers enter a regional office to correct an item on their certificate they can be assured with a 95% certainty that they will have their amendment accepted the first time it is completed. This will also have a residual effect on other customers coming to our office because they will be able to be served in a more timely fashion and will avoid the potential for upset customers who have had to make time to come back to correct errors that should have been caught earlier.

Evaluation

Because the structure has already been put in place for monitoring the rejection rate of each employee, office, and region in addition to the state rejection rate it will be very easy to pull data from before and after this training to identify if it has had the desired effect. Rejections will continue to be monitored and employees will be held accountable for those rejections. If this plan is followed as outlined, rejections could be reanalyzed in January 2019 and assessed to see if this error has decreased in prevalence and if other errors have arisen or been resolved as a result.

One of the key points of this study is that it shows the importance of maintaining data. Our division specializes in maintaining data for citizens and utilizing that for many useful purposes.

However, we did not collect any data regarding how we well we were doing serving our customers. Karl

Pearson, the founder of mathematical statistics stated, "That which is measured, improves." This is a key principle because as we set up the expectation with employees that they will be measured according to this rubric that gives them a goal for which to strive. They end up paying more attention because they are given clear direction. It also identifies ways that we as an agency can improve our processes and procedures to help our employees and customers.

The work of keeping records helps future generations learn from our errors and allows us set them up for success. As record keeping practices for public health data have improved over time, so too, can our practices of recording and improving customer service data. It is difficult and at times boring work to make sure that our interactions are properly logged and recorded, but as we do so, it will manifest valuable findings that will help us focus our efforts and not just work harder, but work smarter. We can fulfill DHEC's mission and vision of helping healthy people live happier in healthy communities as we show our commitment to Embracing Service, Inspiring Innovation, Promoting Teamwork, and Pursuing Excellence.

January 2017 Monthly Totals

PATERNITY ACKNOWLEDGMENT'S 169	
LEGITIMATION'S 19	
PARENTAGE AFFIDAVIT'S 2	
AFFIDAVIT'S 60	-
REJECTION'S 22	•
DEATH REJECTIONS 6	
DEATH AFFIDAVITS31	

County Transmittal Information

10 11 12 13 13 14 15 16 16 17 17 18 19 20 20 21 22 23 23 24 25 27 27 28 9 7 Completed and/or Date Amendment 2/30/2018 Notarized 9/28/2017 9/18/2017 9/14/2017 9/18/2017 9/15/2017 8/22/2017 6/14/2017 8/22/2017 8/21/2017 8/18/2017 7/26/2017 7/21/2017 7/21/2017 7/13/2017 7/6/2017 9/7/2017 9/7/2017 8/9/2017 8/8/2017 8/7/2017 8/4/2017 8/4/2017 8/4/2017 8/4/2017 8/2/2017 8/1/2017 7/7/2017 Date Sent to State 2/30/2018 Office 9/28/2017 9/22/2017 9/19/2017 9/18/2017 8/21/2017 10/4/2017 9/15/2017 8/22/2017 8/18/2017 7/13/2017 7/21/2017 9/7/2017 9/7/2017 9/7/2017 9/5/2017 8/9/2017 8/8/2017 8/7/2017 8/4/2017 8/4/2017 8/4/2017 8/4/2017 8/2/2017 7/26/2017 7/21/2017 8/1/2017 7/6/2017 Name of Registrant (First John Smith and Last) 1971<u>-0654</u>321 00-20180230-123456 SFN 02-20170907-005876 F-Birth 02-20170907-005878 F-Birth 02-20170816-005388 K 02-20170809-005163 F-Birth 02-20170928-006252 K 02-20170918-006050 K 02-20170914-005986 02-20170919-006067 K 02-20170915-006033 L 02-20170613-003902 L 02-20170822-005558 02-20170821-005516 L 02-20170818-005481 L 02-20170808-005146 K 02-20170807-005073 02-20170804-005062 K 02-20170804-005026 02-20170804-005045 L 02-20170714-004535 F-Death 02-20170726-004797 K 02-20170721-004698 K 02-20170721-004704 K 02-20170713-004508 L 02-20170707-004427 02-20170706-004375 F-Birth 02-20170710-004450 F-Death 02-20170804-005027 L 02-20170801-004930 F-Death Amendment Receipt Number F-Death Amendment Type/Code provide evidence within the No, not necessary Did Applicant attempt to Yes, Included first 7 years? Name of CSR amendment completing Caleb Cox Date Printed and Notified 10/13/2017 10/05/17 Customer 3/7/2018 9/22/2017 09/20/17 9/12/2017 09/08/17 9/12/2017 09/08/17 8/15/2017 08/11/17 10/4/2017 09/25/17 9/21/2017 09/20/17 9/12/2017 09/08/17 8/29/2017 08/23/17 8/23/2017 08/22/17 8/23/2017 08/22/17 8/11/2017 08/09/17 8/10/2017 08/08/17 8/10/2017 08/07/17 8/10/2017 08/07/17 8/10/2017 08/07/17 7/13/2017 07/10/17 9/8/2017 09/06/17 7/28/2017 07/24/17 7/28/2017 07/24/17 7/10/2017 07/07/17 8/9/2017 08/07/17 8/8/2017 08/03/2017 8/8/2017 08/02/17 8/2/2017 07/27/17 18-Jul 07/17/17 by State Office 10/02/17 09/18/17 Date Received 3/2/2018

381	0	0	0	0	∞						59	49	Total
0	0		0	0	0				0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0						0	
2	0	0	0	0	0				0		0	0	
52	0	0	0	0	0	6	5	5		12		6	
71	0		0	0	2				9		9	10	
112	0	0	0	0	2							15	
55	0		0	0	2							6	
89	0	0	0	0	2	3 7				13	23	12	
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11.1%	9 1	0.0%		∞	9.1%	Ь	11	0.0%		ъ	10.0%	Ы	10	0.0%		7	6.0%	Hampton
15.9%	44 7	6.3%	2	32	8.7%	4	46	7.1%	2	28	9.6%	ъ	52	6.5%	2	31	9.4%	Charleston
5.6%	18 1	0.0%		13	0.0%		21	0.0%		14	18.8%	ω	16	8.3%	ш	12	5.3%	Beaufort
11.8%	December	3.4% D	רפו	November	9.4%		October	6.7%	ber	September	11.4%	<u>_</u>	August	7.0%		July	8.7%	Low Country
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7.1%	14 1	25.0%	4	16	25.0%	ω	12	0.0%		∞	16.7%	2	12	27.3%	ω	11	17.8%	Georgetown
0.0%	29	0.0%		25	0.0%		35	0.0%		31	6.4%	ω	47	12.1%	4	33	3.5%	Florence
0.0%	2	0.0%		2	0.0%		2	33.3%	ь	ω	0.0%		И	14.3%	ы	7	9.5%	Chesterfield
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2.9%	December	3.8% D	ר	November	3.7%	·	October	1.7%	ber	September	4.7%	_	August	4.2%		July	3.6%	Upstate
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Department of Health and Environmental Control

In order to amend the birth record, the affidavit below must be completed and returned to this office.

- 1. Affidavit must be signed in the presence of a notary public or other officer having official seal.
- 2. Affidavit must be signed as outlined in enclosed instructions.
- 3. Affidavit is not acceptable if erasures or alterations are made.

V dł	nec	SOUTH	Affida I CAROLINA DEPAR		ection to Birth Red HEALTH AND ENVI		NTROL	Page 2 of 2	
Enter Correct Information	John Lo	uis Sample	REGISTRANT'S FU	ILL NAME AT	BIRTH	139-00-	STATE FILE N	NUMBER	
Concerning Person Whose Birth Record	BIRTH E-	Month	Day Year	BIRTH	City or Town	Coun		State	
Is Being Amended	DATE FO	bruary	30 2000	PLACE	Your Town	Your C	-	SC	
	IT	EM OMITTE	D OR IN ERROR	BIR	TH CERTIFICATE SHOW	WS	SHOULD	BE	
TO BE	Registra	nt's Given N	Name	Jon Louis	•	John Lo	uis Sample		
OR CORRECTED	Mother's	Maiden Na	ıme	Simple		Sample			
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(AFFIX SEAL)	01/01/2	020							
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ABSTRACT of 1 Your town elementary school records Doc# 123456789 Your town, SC 08/20/2006 Supporting 2 Mother's Birth Certificate 1982-999999 Her town, OH 08/02/1975									
								1975	
Evidence	2 Moth	er's Apostill	05/05/	1998					
	INFORMATION CONCERNING REGISTRANT AS STATED IN DOCUMENT OF CORRESPONDING NUMBER ABOVE.								
	1 John Louis Sample DOB 02/30/2000								
	2 Sally	· ·							
	2 Sally	Mae Samp	le Age 24						
Loertify that I have		FVI	DENCE REVIEWED BY		DATE REVIEWED	STATE OFFICE APPROV	'AL	DATE FILED	
I certify that I have examined the documents referred to above, that they show no changes or erasures, and appear to be	Signatur	e of CSR	SCHOOL REVIEWED BY		1/20/2020	(Do not sign here office only)		3/1/2020	
authentic.									

DHEC 0613 (07/2016)